

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

COMPLETE LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-16 : (Canceled)

Claim 17 : (New) A method of effecting protection of a digital communications system having N independently configurable communications units and K protection units allocated to the N communications units, where 1 is less than or equal to K is less than or equal to N, and where N is greater than or equal to 2, the method comprising the steps of:

a) in an initial setting-up stage for the protection units, supplying each of one or more of the protection units with configuration data relating to the communications units, and storing said configuration data in respective memory locations in the each protection unit;

b) when so required, subsequently updating said configuration data with update data relating to the communications units;

c) in the event of a fault occurring involving one of the communications units, sending to one of the one or more of the protection units an indication of which communications unit is involved in the fault; and

d) causing that protection unit to use said indication to identify the memory location associated with the fault-related communications unit and to use the configuration data in that memory location as its own configuration data, thereby to take over the role of that communications unit in the communications system.

Claim 18 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein said one or more of the protection units are low-priority-traffic carrying units and are supplied with their own configuration data.

Claim 19 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein an identification flag is sent to the one or more of the protection units before the configuration-update data relating to the communications units are sent, in order to identify the particular communications unit to which the update data pertain.

Claim 20 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein said indication is sent to the protection unit by way of a controller unit which controls configuring of the communications units.

Claim 21 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 20, wherein said indication is sent to the protection unit from the controller unit by way of a bus.

Claim 22 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein said indication is sent to the protection unit directly by the fault-related communications unit.

Claim 23 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the fault is detected by a sensor device, and wherein said indication is sent to the protection unit directly by the sensor device.

Claim 24 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the configuration data associated with the communications units 1 to N are supplied to the one or more of the protection units in consecutive sequence from one of the communications units 1 and N to the other of the communications units 1 and N.

Claim 25 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 18, wherein, before the protection unit takes over the role of the fault-related communications unit in the communications system, the traffic previously associated with the protection unit is either diverted to a working communications unit or is discarded.

Claim 26 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 25, wherein, after the protection unit has taken over the traffic of the fault-related communications unit, the fault which occasioned such taking over is rectified, the taken-over traffic is redirected back to the fault-related unit, the protection unit is provided with its own configuration data and traffic is again supplied to the protection unit.

Claim 27 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 26, wherein, once the fault has been rectified, the fault-related communications unit is reconfigured with the configuration data currently required of that unit and these configuration data are sent to the one or more of the protection units.

Claim 28 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein $K=1$.

Claim 29 : (New) A K:N protection arrangement for a digital telecommunications system having N independently configurable communications units and K protection units allocated to the N communications units, where 1 is less than or equal to K is less than or equal to N, and wherein N is greater than or equal to 2, the arrangement comprising:

a) a means for supplying one or more of the protection units with configuration data relating to the communications units, and storing said configuration data in said one or more of the protection units;

b) a means for subsequently updating said configuration data with update data relating to the communications units;

c) a means for sensing an occurrence of a fault involving one of the communications units;

d) a means for sending to one of the protection units an indication of which communications unit is involved in the fault; and

e) a means for causing the protection unit to use said indication to access the configuration data associated with the fault-related communications unit and to use said configuration data as its own configuration data, thereby to take over the role of that communications unit in the communications system.

Claim 30 : (New) The protection arrangement as claimed in claim 29, wherein $K=1$.

Claim 31 : (New) The protection arrangement as claimed in claim 30, wherein the telecommunications system is a synchronous digital hierarchy communications system.

Claim 32 : (New) A synchronous digital hierarchy communications system comprising the protection arrangement as claimed in claim 29.